

TESTIMONY OF JOANNE SAMUEL GOLDBLUM

Appropriations Committee

February 18, 2009

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to address the committee. My name is Joanne Goldblum and I am the president and founder of The Diaper Bank. For the past two years, The Diaper Bank has received \$150,000 from the state of Connecticut through DCF. The governor's budget completely eliminates this funding. I am here today to explain why this committee should try to restore this funding.

Diapers are a basic need. In modern America, babies cannot do without diapers any more than they can do without proper nutrition. The one area that I agree with the governor's proposed budget was in her effort to protect food programs. I believe she should have protected basic hygiene programs, like the Diaper Bank, too.

Why did the governor cut hygiene but not food? Because in this country we are not used to thinking about hygiene items as a basic need. Diapers and other hygiene items are specifically excluded from Food Stamps and WIC, the main supports for basic needs for poor families. Most people don't know that, so let me repeat it. A poor family cannot use WIC or Food stamps to buy diapers. So if you've timed off of the public cash assistance programs and you are unemployed, you cannot get diapers at all.

Our public policy seems to be saying that hygiene items are not a basic need. But I can tell you from my experience working with Connecticut's poorest families and being in their homes, that hygiene items, especially diapers for children, are a very basic need. Babies who lack diapers are unhappy and unhealthy and mothers who cannot afford enough diapers for their babies cannot fulfill their responsibilities in our society. Imagine for yourself what it would be like to be in the house with a baby and not have enough diapers. I can tell you that it is devastating. For the last two years Connecticut has put itself at the forefront of recognizing diapers as a basic need in the life of a child. The current economic situation does not change this reality.

Another point I would to make is that the State of Connecticut will save money by supporting the diapering needs of its poorest families. This is because while diapers are a small thing, they affect big things like health care, education and employment. Babies who wear the same diapers for too long get severe diaper rash and other health problems and need to see the doctor. It is cheaper for the state of Connecticut to provide diapers than emergency room services. Babies without diapers cannot go to daycare so their mothers can't go to school or to work. It is cheaper for the State of Connecticut to provide diapers than to provide cash assistance for unemployed and uneducated mothers and fathers. So cutting funding for diapers will cost the state money not save it.

Finally, I would like to tell you that the need for diapers among poor families in Connecticut is tremendous and growing.

In the last 2 years, with state support and the financial support of a number of foundations and private funders we serve 52 agencies in Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven. We distribute over 200,000 diapers a month. We reach over 3000 children a year and we get calls every day from parents of children that we have to turn away.

The budget that the governor has given to the legislature puts too high a burden on the most vulnerable individuals in our state. Children and families who cannot afford to pay for their most basic needs are not the people who should bear the burden for the states fiscal crisis. I urge you to continue support of The Diaper Bank and the many agencies that work to improve life for Connecticut's most vulnerable children and families.

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